Remarks/Arguments

By this Amendment, claims 12 and 14 have been revised, and claims 13 and 16-17 have been cancelled.

Claims 12-17 were rejected as being unpatentable over Watatani in view of Chen et al. as evidenced by Sugahara et al. Applicants respectfully traverse this rejection with respect to the now-pending claims 12 and 14-15.

In the Office Action, the Examiner states:

> "The disclosure of Chen is not limited to any particular low dielectric material, therefore, making commonly used low dielectric organic SOG insulating layer obvious. Hence, it would have been obvious … to use oxygen and a mixed gas containing nitrogen and hydrogen (such as N2H2) as taught by Chen in the process of Watatani for ashing in order to effectively remove the photoresist from a low-k dielectric layer."

Without acquiescing to the Examiner's reasoning, independent claims 12 and 14 have been revised herein to more clearly define over the cited references. In particular, in addition to reciting the ratio of O_2 to N_2H_2 in the mixed gas as being 90:10, the independent claims now also recite a pressure of 0.45Pa and at a temperature of 100ºC. As discussed previously, the claimed invention is in clear contrast with the teachings of Chen which introduces N_2H_2 at a rate of 100 to 300 sccm and O_2 at a rate of 200 to 600 sccm. See col. 4, lines 17-19. As such, even if Chen is somehow combined with Watatani in the fashion suggested by the Examiner, the resultant combination(s) would still be distinct from the presently claimed invention.

No other issues remaining, reconsideration and favorable action upon the claims 12 and 14-15 now pending in the application are requested.

Respectfully submitted,

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